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INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 1118
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO PRIORITY 1131
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 7153
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 7144
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 7312
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 3130
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY PRIORITY 1284
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 1169
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 3280
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY 0268
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY 2770

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000105

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [XI](#) [XG](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH RESPONSE ON MAGHREB KIDNAPPING THREAT

REF: A. STATE 769 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. PARIS 30

Classified By: Andrew Young, Political Counselor, reason 1.4 (b and d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: France shares our concerns about the kidnapping and security threats to westerners in Africa's Sahel and Maghreb regions. The French MFA routinely issues travel warnings in an effort to dissuade French citizens from traveling in much of the Sahel and Maghreb regions. France shares the U.S. concern on countries paying ransom and wants to continue our dialog and cooperation in addressing the AQIM threat. END SUMMARY.

MFA WARNS CITIZENS AGAINST TRAVEL IN THE SAHEL

[1](#)2. (SBU) MFA Desk Officer for Sahel issues, Marie Audouard, responded to reftel demarche by noting that the MFA issues travel warnings for French citizens via its website (<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/conseils-au-x-voyageurs>), and that currently the GOF "strongly recommends all French citizens (tourists and residents) leave Northern Mali and Northern Niger." This follows the kidnapping of a French citizen on November 29, 2009 in Menaka, Mali. Mauritania has long been subject to a French travel warning and the MFA also posted a specific alert advising against participation in the Northern Mali Essakane Festival.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Audouard also noted that as of January 12, by France's count, westerners kidnapped in the Maghreb include the French citizen referred to above, three Spanish citizens taken in Mauritania on December 19, 2009, and two Italian citizens also kidnapped in Mauritania.

[1](#)4. (C) As reported in ref B, during his consultations with French officials on January 5, AFRICOM Commander General Ward heard that France remains concerned that AQIM is actively pursuing new opportunities to kidnap westerners. France is unhappy that for both AQIM and Somali pirates some countries are paying ransom to free their citizens. The GOF is interested in making travel agents more accountable for facilitating travel to regions covered by MFA travel warnings.

ALSO A CONCERN IN THE NORTH AFRICA DIVISION

[1](#)5. (C) MFA North Africa DAS Cyrille Rogeau and Morocco Desk Officer Marie Buscail told poloff January 12 and January 26, respectively, that French authorities are well aware of the dangers in the Sahel. They are keen to continue cooperating closely with the USG in the region, and, where possible, to

"combine forces" on combating terrorism. Buscail reported that France has also issued official travel warnings for Algeria and Libya, in addition to the other countries in the Sahel region. She noted that we must "advance discretely," in light of the risks posed by increasing media attention to the terrorists in the area. Moreover, she argued that the French at times have more room to maneuver than do we, in light of their historic role in the Sahel: "Sometimes people there are more accustomed to seeing a visible security role for France than for the United States," she said, noting that the USG has in the past communicated messages in coordination with our French counterparts, and even sometimes through them.

¶6. (C) Rogeau reported that Algeria in particular has remained a reliable partner on counter-terrorism, despite the tense state of Franco-Algerian bilateral relations at the moment. Even in the context of occasional diplomatic tussles -- such as the current upset in Algiers following French inclusion of Algerian citizens on a list equivalent to the American TSA list -- intelligence sharing and security coordination continue apace, according to Rogeau.

¶7. (C) As to the payment of ransom for kidnapped French citizens, Buscail said the GOF position is currently under consideration. Responding to poloff's explanation of USG policy, she said GOF officials are aware of our strong stance against paying ransoms. Buscail said the French agree with the principle behind our position, and do not seek to reward or negotiate with terrorists, kidnappers and pirates. At the same time, the French will not likely adopt a maximalist position on ransoms, such as the one supported by Algeria.

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She reported that Algeria's recent proposal to impose international sanctions on countries who pay ransoms to liberate their citizens has met opposition in Europe. As the GOF moves forward in developing its position on this issue, Buscail added, it will do so in close cooperation with other EU member states.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Because of its historical ties and the military and intelligence assets it maintains in the region, France will remain an important interlocutor for us on the general issue of AQIM/Sahel and Maghreb security, as well as in discussions on non-payment of ransoms.

¶9. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
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